Volga-German Immigrants in Kansas

Teacher's Manual

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TEACHER INFORMATION

Introduction

This trunk is designed to be used as a comprehensive unit in the fifth grade classroom. Though the information deals specifically with the Volga Germans who settled in Kansas, their story can be applied to nearly every people who left their homeland to start a new life in the United States. Their reasons for leaving, their problems in a foreign land, the decisions they faced, their unique ethnic characteristics and assimilation into a new culture are all comparable to the struggles of many immigrants.

In this trunk you will find:

2 aprons
2 scarves
2 caps
2 pipes
1 boutonniere
1 bridal veil
1 kraut cutter
1 kraut stomp
2 sets of purchasing activity cards and instructions
1 mounted reproduction newspaper page

Books and Tapes:
Tape # 1: Volga German Music and "Exodus to Freedom" (Volga German Songs)
Tape # 2: Volga German Dance Music
Tape # 3: Spoken Verses in German and English
1 copy Conquering The Wind
1 copy German Hero Sagas and Folk Tales

I. Teacher/Student Manual

This manual contains fourteen sections covering various aspects of the Volga German experience. Each section includes a teaching sequence as well as materials which groups or individual students may study and share with the rest of the class. Below is a list of the different sections plus activities and subjects which may be discussed in association with each one.

1) The Family Tree of the Karlin Family
   What is "genealogy" and why are people interested in it?
   Draw your family tree.
   What can you learn from historic photographs?

2) The History of the Volga Germans and Why they Left Russia
   How do the different accounts of why the Volga Germans left Russia vary, and how do you account for this?
   Why did they leave Russia and choose to come to Kansas?
   How can a diary or journal be useful to a person interested in learning about an ancestor or a certain period of time?

3) The Trip to America
   How do you travel today and how does this differ from the transportation used by the Volga German immigrants?
   What would the immigrants have brought with them to America?
   How would you choose land for a whole group of people to live on? Would this be easy to do?

4) The Settlement
   Have you ever moved before? What problems did you have settling into your new home? Would the Volga Germans have had similar problems or any other ones?
   What sorts of things would the immigrants have needed to buy first?

5) Religious Conduct and Christmas Customs
   There was very little social life on the plains, which made the church both a spiritual and social center for the community. Do churches and synagogues play the same role today? Why or Why not?
   What special occasions did your parents or grandparents celebrate that we do not celebrate today or celebrate differently?

6) Volga German Wedding Customs

What are some differences and similarities among the wedding practices of different religious and ethnic groups?

This section provides an opportunity for students to "dress up" in the items provided in the trunk and hold a mock wedding.

7) Volga German Houses

Have students keep a list of the activities their family does and where in their houses these take place. Where would these activities have taken place in a Volga German house?

What sort of house would you have built on the prairie 100 years ago? What materials would you have used?

8) A Village Way of Life

The Volga Germans held property cooperatively, making the village more like a large family than just a town. This was called the Mir system. Would students like to live in that sort of communal system? Why or Why not?

9) Volga German Clothing

How does our clothing today differ from that of the Volga Germans?

10) Volga German Foods

Talk about the family in terms of it being a self-contained food processing plant. Who would have done what chores and why? What chores do we still have to do; which don't we do and why?

What types of things would the Volga Germans have bought at the general store?

11) Children's Games, Rhymes, and Tongue Twisters

It is suggested that you try some of the games in this section. Most are quite easy to catch on to and require little or nor special equipment.

Compare the Volga German games to those which you play now. How are they different or similar?

12) Superstitions, Folk Medicines and Children's Folklore

What superstitions did the students have when they were young? Are any similar to those held by Volga German children? (Easter Bunny, Tooth Fairy...)

Do students think there is any truth to the folk cures mentioned in the section? Would any of the remedies work?

13) Songs, Dances and Lullabies

Music for the dances is on the cassette tape. You might want to use them in association with a physical education or music class.

14) The 'German-American Advocate': A Hays City, Kansas Newspaper

It should be clear after looking at the reproduced newspaper page and reading the translations of the German advertisements that the Volga Germans were quickly accepted into the areas in which they settled. They were hard working, clean and industrious people who prospered quickly.

What does the name, "The German-American Advocate" tell you right off the bat?

Suggested Approach

Naturally it is up to you, the teacher to decide how you will use the information and objects supplied in this trunk; it is possible to spend anywhere from two or three days up to three weeks on the activities, depending on how much time you allow students to work during class, the time spent on in-class reports, and the extent of class discussion, improvisations and game time. We suggest that you take some time to look over the material yourself and map out a plan that you feel will work for your class. Using each student packet to some extent will insure that your students will acquire a good general understanding of the Kansas immigrant experience, as well as a specific knowledge of the Volga German people who settled in Ellis County in the 19th Century.

The notebook contains written information for students to read on their own, and a glossary of terms. We suggest that one section be assigned to two or three students who will read it together, summarize the information and present it, along with the photographs and any additional materials they may find, to the class as a whole. The rest of the class should be encouraged to ask questions during the presentation.

After all the information has been shared and reviewed, students will enjoy dressing up in the clothing and using the objects to do some role-playing. For instance, using the information in the wedding section as a scenario, several students can play bride, groom, groomsmen, etc. and go about "town" (the classroom) inviting friends and neighbors (classmates) to the wedding ceremony and Hochzeit which follows. Of course, this activity should be preceded by asking the bride's parents for her hand, and followed by festivity, eating, and dancing. Or, several students could discuss the Czar, purchasing land, reasons for leaving Russia; there are many possibilities. We suggest that you ask your students which scenes they would like to act out. It gives them a little more opportunity to determine what they will do in class, and they will usually come up with ideas similar to those you had in mind.

One last thought: From time to time teachers are asked if their class couldn't entertain or "do something" for PTA, open house at the school, or some similar event. The information and objects in the trunk provides an excellent point of departure for you and your students to provide simple entertainment which gives parents and others an idea of the things you have been doing in class. It allows each student to participate in a presentation, and at the same time reinforces things they have been studying.

Using the Objects

The objects in this trunk are reproductions of artifacts in the collections of the Kansas State Historical Society. THE OBJECTS ARE MEANT TO BE USED. But keep in mind that they are meant to be used many times in many classrooms. We would appreciate it if you would use them with care. If any objects are missing or damaged when the trunk arrives, please let us know when you return the trunk.

The cassette tapes contain information which corresponds to the material in several of the sections. Tape # 1 (Volga German Music) contains good examples of some lighthearted German polkas and hammered dulcimer music. Side B, "Exodus to Freedom," presents songs which relate to the sections about leaving Russia and Volga German weddings. Tape # 2, Dance Music, provides the music to accompany the dances outlined in section 13. "Spoken Verses in German and English" contains readings of the German verses and songs found in sections 2, 6, 11, 12 and 13, and may be useful in working on the pronunciation of rhymes and tongue-twisters, as well as acquainting students with the sound of the German language.

The books, **CONQUERING THE WIND** and **GERMAN HERO SAGAS AND FOLK TALES**, may be used to read aloud to the class, or made available for reading by students. Many of the stories in **CONQUERING THE WIND** relate directly to the information in the individual section and make good supplementary reading for students.

Evaluation

We request that each teacher take a few minutes to fill out the evaluation form before returning the trunk. Your constructive response will help us in improving the trunk outreach program. Be sure to include the total number of students who used the trunk--this includes audiences at special presentations and other classes which viewed the trunk, as well as your own.

History

The story of Volga German immigration to Kansas in 1876 really began some one-hundred-thirteen years before in Russia (1763) when Catherine the Great issued her "Manifest" which was an invitation to foreigners (particularly Western Europeans) to settle on land in Russia. Catherine was interested in bringing hard-working colonists to Russia to settle the undeveloped, semi-arid regions of her domain. To encourage potential colonists, she promised free exercise of religion, the right to build churches, bell towers and schools, and to have priests and teachers. Colonists were guaranteed thirty years freedom from taxes, levies, and land service. They were exempted from military duty for an indefinite time. Free transportation to Russia and money for the trip were offered to them. Permanent land allotments were to be given the colonists, although ownership was retained by the colony rather than the individual.

Catherine's German agents met with much success. The Seven Year's War had just ended and the German peasants were being heavily taxed to pay for the cost of that war. Germany at this time was made up of many small principalities each of which supported a noble, ruling family. That family taxed its subjects, chose a religion for them, made the laws, and drafted the able-bodied men to fight their petty wars. Poverty, famine, epidemics, and war kept Germany in upheaval. Many of the people were tired of this and saw Catherine's offer as a way to escape the turbulent Germany in which they were living. Between 1763 and 1767, about 25,000 persons emigrated from Hessia, Baden, Wurttemberg, Alsace, and the Palatinate, and from Bavaria, Tyrol, and Switzerland. They settled in an area around the lower Volga River and thus became known as Volga Germans.

The journey from Germany to the lower Volga area was a difficult one. A combination of boat trips and overland travel caused much suffering among the colonists. When they arrived at their land, they found it to be wild, dry steppes. The area was totally different from the heavily-forested countryside and cultivated farmland they had left in Germany. They arrived too late in the season to plant a crop and so suffered a bitter winter of hunger and death.

But, in the spring, they began to work on the land and although the first ten years of crops were failures, they received food from the Russian government and continued to work hard in cultivating the fields and developing their villages. Many of the colonists had been craftsmen not farmers and so they were really learning an entirely new occupation in the process.

The lower Volga area served as a buffer between the wild Asiatic areas of Russia and the more civilized, Europeanized cities and countryside. As a result, the Volga German colonies bore the brunt of attacks by the Kirghiz nomads, who were Moslem

tribesmen living across the Ural River. Until the Russian government finally sent some soldiers for protection, the Volga German colonies were constantly under threat of attack and pillage by the Kirghiz horsemen. This threat on top of severe winters and a harsh landscape made life difficult in the beginning. But with perseverance and hard work the colonists managed to achieve peace and prosperity by the middle of the 19th century. Farming villages were still the most common, but a few of the cities grew to become market places with tradesmen and craftsmen practicing their skills and merchants selling their wares.

Religion was very important to the German colonists. Villages were settled by persons belonging to the same religious group. So, Mennonites settled in their own villages, Catholics in theirs, and Evangelicals (Protestants) in theirs.

The German settlements were somewhat isolated from major population areas in Russia, especially at the beginning when the colonists first arrived. For that reason and because the Germans felt in many ways superior to the Russian peasants around them, the villagers kept to themselves. As a result, they continued to speak German and to practice the cultural traditions of their former homeland.

One such tradition, the colony style of life, they imported directly from their native southwestern areas of Germany. Farmers lived in the village and went out each day to work in their fields. No one was isolated on an individual farm. Church, school, and social life centered in the village. Each family owned land in the village upon which a house, barn, and ambar were built. The other lands including fields outside the village were held in common under the "Mir" system.

After the death of Catherine the Great, each new czar established his own policy toward the German colonies on the Volga. Because of the many special rights granted to Volga Germans, their Russian neighbors were very jealous. About 1850, Alexander II began his Russification program which slowly took away the privileges that Catherine had given to the German colonists. But because they had never learned to speak or read the Russian language, the Germans were often unaware of the changes made in laws governing them. In 1874 a new law was passed requiring all male colonists to serve in the Russian army for six-years. When the Volga Germans learned of this they quickly realized things were changing for the worse.

In the spring of 1874, three thousand Catholic colonists met at Herzog to discuss immigration. They elected five delegates to visit America and look for land to purchase. The delegates proceeded to the United States via Hamburg, Germany and spent a day at Sutton, Clay County, Nebraska. They brought back a pound of soil, some prairie and bluestem grass, paper money,

and literature about the land. Their favorable impressions of America caused four of the five to immigrate to the United States later that year. In December 1874 another two delegates traveled to Kansas and went to look at Santa Fe Railroad lands in Pawnee County, Kansas. However, they returned to the Volga dissatisfied and consequently influenced many to remain in Russia.

During November and December, 1874, the Russians drafted the first men from the German colonies into the Czar's army. This act brought about a sense of urgency to those who had been talking of immigration and in 1875 large numbers of Germans began to leave Russia for the States. The journey of one group which left Katharinenstadt in October of 1875 is comparable to the experiences of many other Volga German families who left Russia for the plains of the central United States.

From 1874 through the turn of the century, Kansas welcomed a significant cross-section of Russian German immigrants. Numerous Mennonite groups chose to settle in central Kansas, receiving considerable attention at the time of their arrival and later much acclaim for the Turkey Red hard winter wheat they brought with them from Russia. Catholic and Evangelical Protestant Black Sea Germans, so named for the area in Russia from which they immigrated, also settled in central Kansas. Protestant Volga Germans settled in larger numbers in Nebraska than they did in Kansas though many did buy land in Marion, Rush, Barton and Russell counties, as well as in some towns in bordering counties.

Although the Protestant and Catholic Volga German daily lifestyles were much the same, their religious traditions differed. The Catholics lived in a predominantly Protestant state. They did not give up the village system for one of individual homesteads. These beliefs and practices, coupled with the common bond of language, slowed the Catholic Volga German's rate of assimilation into mainstream Kansas culture and allowed them to maintain a self-imposed cultural isolation for many years after settling in Ellis County. For that reason we have concentrated our study on their settlements as representative of the traditional life-style that most Germans took from Germany to Russia and, a century or more later, from Russia to Kansas. The reminiscences of Athanasius Karlin, a member of one of those families who left Katharinenstadt, describes the journey to Kansas, the buying of land, and the founding of the new village of Catherine on the grasslands of Ellis County, Kansas.

Vocabulary List

Ambar	Store house for grain; a granary.
Arid ('ar-əd)	Too little rain to support farming.
Assimilation (a-sim-a-la-shan)	The act of adopting the cultural traditions of another group of people.
Bachhaus	Summer kitchen - a small structure, separate from the house in which all the cooking was done in the summer months.
Boutonniere (but-n-ir)	A flower or bouquet worn on the lapel or in the button hole of a jacket (usually by a man).
Brechpflug	A special plow made to slide under the grass roots, turning the sod over and leaving the bare earth ready to be farmed. Also known as a sod-busting plow or a break plow - and used to cut sod for sod houses.
Buffalo Chips	The solid waste of a buffalo, dried in the sun and burned by pioneers on the prairie to heat their homes and cook their food.
Carduse	A cap with a small brim in front.
Changeling ('chanj-ling)	A spirit that can assume the look of another living thing, especially taking on the exact look of a human baby so that no one knows the change has taken place.
Chanticleer ('chant-a-'klir)	A rooster (especially called so in poetry).
Colonist (Kal-ə-nəst)	One who settles in a new country.
Customs Officers	Employees of a national government whose job is to make sure people coming into or leaving their country pay the proper duties or tolls on property that they own. Sometimes customs officers also check passports, etc.

Lebaster (li-bas-tər)	A type of white powder (like Plaster of Paris) that when mixed with water can be used to paint walls white; a whitewashing compound.
Manifest or Manifesto ('man-a-,fest)	A public declaration of intentions, motives, or views.
Mennonites ('men-a-,nits)	A religious group from Germany noted for their simple lifestyle and rejection of military service who settled in Russia at the request of Catharine the Great and later immigrated to the United States. They are noted for introducing Turkey Red Wheat, a wheat that grew well in Kansas and other dry prairie climates.
Mid-Wife	A women who assists another woman through childbirth.
Mir System	A method of distributing farm land among a group of people, practiced by the Volga Germans. Land was owned in common and redistributed every 10 years.
Mustard Plaster	A preparation containing dried mustard applied to the body like an ointment to help heal and soothe during sickness.
Nee ('nā)	Born; usually used to identify a woman by her maiden family name.
Nogging ('nag-ing)	Any combination of bricks, stones, and/or clay used to fill in the gap between the outer and inner walls of a structure.
(Owned) In Common	The process of owning something together as a group...different from private ownership in that everyone has a share and a voice in how the thing owned is used.
Oxen ('ak-sen)	Adult male cattle physically changed to make them grow larger and stronger to be used as a beast of burden, i.e. to pull a plow or a wagon.
Patriarch ('pa-tre-,ark)	The oldest male member of a family.

Dialect ('di-a-,lekt)	A variation of spoken language unique to people living in a certain region of a country or belonging to a particular social class.
Dowry ('dau(ə)r-e)	A gift of money or property given or promised to a husband by his wife's family when he marries her.
Dug Out	A temporary shelter made by digging a cave into the side of a hill or digging a hole in the ground and putting a roof over it.
Emigrant ('em-i-grənt)	One who leaves his country to settle in another.
Filzstiefel	Heavy felt boot liners used in place of socks and worn under heavy, high-topped leather boots.
Fodder	Food for cattle, horses, or sheep.
Frame House	A house built from wood.
Genealogy (je-ne-al-ə-je)	An account of the descent of a person or family from an ancestor.
High Mass	A Catholic religious ceremony with communion (the taking of wine and bread) as its central focus. High Mass is a more complex, involved ceremony compared to Low Mass.
Hinterstube	Children's bedroom, usually found in the attic of the Volga German house.
Holy Water	Water blessed by a priest and used in religious ceremonies.
Husking	The process of removing the husk or outer leaves from the ear of corn.
Immigrant (im-i-grənt)	One who has come to settle in a new country.
Küche	Kitchen in a Volga German house.
Kriliz	Small entry area to a Volga German house. It helped to keep out cold blasts of snow, rain, and wind.
Labor (la-bər)	Preparing to give birth to a baby.

Pentagram ('pent-a-,gram)	A five-pointed star.
Pillage ('pil-ij)	To loot or plunder; to steal by forcibly taking something away from the owner.
Poultice ('pol-tas)	A medicated, warm preparation spread on a cloth and applied to a sore to heal and soothe it.
Principality (Prin(t)s-(ə)'pal-ət-e)	The territory of a prince or the country that gives title to a prince.
Reminiscences ('rem-a-'nis-nts-z)	A story of a past memorable experience.
Rubel (rü-bəl)	Russian form of money.
Russificaton ('ras-a-fa-'ka-shan)	The official policy of certain Czars to force all foreigners who settled in Russia to adopt the Russian language and Russian customs and traditions.
Russian-Germans	Any of several groups of people who emigrated from Germany to Russia in the 1700's; also their descendants who either moved from Russia or who stayed on in the southern Russia area where their ancestors origi- nally settled. Russian-Germans continued to speak German and retain their German customs while living in Russia.
Schafpelz	A coat of sheepskin with the wool on the inside of the coat.
Schnapps ('shnaps)	Any kind of distilled liquor, especially strong Holland gin.
Schirmmuke	A peaked, fur hat.
Schlafzimmer	Sleeping room.
Shafts	The top part of any pair of boots into which the bottoms of trousers can be tucked.
Simolinka	A Volga German type sod house, dug three feet into the ground with walls built up above that three feet high, and a wooden roof covered with sod.

Sod	The grass, roots, and dirt covering the top of the ground.
Staatsstube	Public Office Room.
Steppes ('steps)	A level, tree-less, arid area of land land in southeastern Europe and Asia. Russian-Germans settled the Russian steppes along the Volga River.
Stone-Mason	A person who is trained to build with stone.
Tract ('trakt)	A large area of land.
Turkey Red Wheat	A variety of hard winter wheat that is planted in the fall and sprouts before winter. It lies dormant until spring when it again begins to grow. Because it is planted in fall rather than in spring, it is harvested earlier than wheat planted in the spring and is thus better suited to the dry plains where hot sun and insects attack wheat in the later summer. Turkey Red wheat was first introduced in Kansas by Mennonites who emigrated here from Russia in the 1870's.
Um Frau	A midwife; a woman who helps another woman give birth to her baby, something like a doctor does today.
Volga German ('vol-ga)	Any of several groups of Germans who immigrated to southern Russia at the invitation of Catharine the Great and settled along the Volga River.
Vows ('vauz)	Solemn promises that persons make to one another.